

GRACE EXALTED—BOASTING EXCLUDED NO. 429

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 19, 1862,
BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.”
Romans 3:27.***

PRIDE is most obnoxious to God. As a sin, His holiness hates it; as a treason, His sovereignty detests it; as a rebellion, the whole of His attributes stand leagued to put it down. God has touched other sins with His finger, but against this vice He has made bare His arm! There have been, I know, terrible judgments against lust, but there have been 10 times as many against that swelling lust of the deceitful heart! Remember, the first transgression had in its essence, pride. The ambitious heart of Eve desired to be as God, knowing good and evil, and Adam imagined that he would be lifted up to divine rank if he dared to pluck and eat. The blasting of Paradise, the sterility of the world, the travail of human birth, the sweat of the brow, and the certainty of death may all be traced to this fruitful mother of mischief, *pride*. Remember Babel, and how God has scattered us and confounded our tongues. It was man's pride which led him to seek for an undivided monarchy, that so he might be great. The tower was to be the rallying point of all the tribes, and would have been the central throne of all human grandeur, but God has scattered us, that pride might not climb to so high a pitch. Pride, you have indeed suffered severe strokes from God! Against you has He furbished His sword, and prepared His weapons of war. The Lord, even the Lord of hosts has sworn it, and He will surely stain the pride of all human glory, and tread all boasting as straw is trod for the dunghill! Talk no more so exceedingly proud; let no arrogance come out of your mouth, for the bows of the mighty have been broken, and the haughtiness of man has been bowed down! Remember Pharaoh and the plagues which God brought on Egypt, and the wonders which He worked in the field of Zoan. Remember the Red Sea, and Rahab cut, and the dragon broken. Think of Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty architect of Babylon, driven out to eat grass like the oxen till his nails grew like birds' claws, and his hair like eagles' feathers. Remember Herod, eaten of worms, because he gave not God the glory; and Sennacherib, with the Lord's hook in his jaws, turned by the way, he came to the place where his sons became his slayers!

Time would fail to tell of the innumerable conquerors, and emperors, and mighty men of earth who have all perished beneath the blast of Your rebuke, O God, because they lifted up themselves, and said, “I am, and there is none beside me.” You have turned wise men backward, and made their knowledge foolishness, and no flesh may glory in Your presence. Yes, when pride has sought to shelter itself in the hearts of God's chosen people, still, the arrows of God have sought it out, and have drunk its blood! God still loves His servants, but pride even in *them*, He abhors. David may be a man after God's own heart, but if his pride shall lift him up to number the people, then he shall have a choice between three chastisements, and he shall be happy to choose the pestilence as being the least of the plagues. Or if Hezekiah shall show to the ambassadors of Babylon his riches, and his treasures, there shall come to him the rebuke—“What have they seen in your house?” And the threat—“Behold they shall take your sons to make them eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Oh, brothers and sisters, forget not that God has uttered the most solemn words, as well as issued the most awful judgments, against pride! “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” “Him who has a high look and a proud heart will I not suffer.” “Pride and arrogance do I hate.” “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud.” “The day of the Lord shall be upon everyone who is proud and lofty, and upon everyone who is lifted up, and he shall be brought low.” “I am against you, O you most proud, says the Lord God of hosts.” There are hundreds of terrible texts like these, but we cannot now recount them all. Now mark, to put an everlasting stigma upon human vanity, and to hurl once and for all, mire and filth upon all human glorying, God has ordained that the only way in which He will save men, shall be a way which utterly excludes the possibility of man's having a single word to say by way of vaunting! He has declared that the only foun-

dation which He will ever lay shall be one by which man's strength shall be broken in pieces, and by which man's pride shall be humbled in the dust! To this subject, I ask your attention this morning. It is to enlarge and amplify the sentiment of the text that I seek. "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith."

We shall notice first of all, *the rejected plan of law*; then we shall note *the excluded vice*. Having so done, we shall notice in the third place, *that the very fact that boasting is excluded, permits of the reception of the worst of sinners*; and we shall close by observing, *that the same system which excludes boasting includes humble and devout gratitude to God for His grace and mercy*.

I. First, then, THE REJECTED PLAN.

There are two ways by which man might have been forever blessed. The one was by works—"This do and you shall live; be obedient and receive the reward; keep the commandment and the blessing shall be yours, well earned and surely paid." The only other plan was—"Receive grace and blessedness as the free gift of God; stand as a guilty sinner having no merit, and as a rebellious sinner deserving the very reverse of goodness, but stand there, and receive all your good things, simply, wholly, and alone of the free love and sovereign mercy of God." Now, the Lord has not chosen the system of works. The word *law*, as used twice in the text, is employed, it is believed by many commentators, out of compliment to the Jews, who were so fond of the word, that their antagonism might not be awakened. But it means here, as elsewhere in Scripture, plan, system, method. There were two plans, two systems, two methods, two spirits—the plan of works and the plan of divine grace. God has once and for all utterly refused the plan of merit and of works, and has chosen to bless men only and entirely through the plan, or method, or *law of faith*. Now, brothers and sisters, we have put the two before you, and we beg you to mark, that there is a distinction between the two, which must never be forgotten. Martin Luther says—"If you can rightly distinguish between works and grace, thank God for your skill, and consider yourself to be an able divine." This, indeed, is the bottom of theology, and he, who can understand this clearly, it seems to me, can never be very heretical! Orthodoxy must surely follow, and the right teaching of God must be understood, when we once and for all, are able to discriminate with accuracy between that which is of man—works, and that which is of God—faith, and divine grace received by faith.

Now, the plan of salvation by works is impossible for us. Even if God had ordained it to be the way by which men should labor to be saved, it is certain that none would have been saved by it, and therefore, all would have perished. For if you would be saved by works, remember O man, that the law requires of you *perfection*. One single flaw, *one offense*, and the law condemns you without mercy! It requires that you should keep it in every point and in every sense, and to its uttermost degree, for its demands are rigorous in the extreme. It knows nothing of freely forgiving because you cannot pay, but like a severe creditor, it takes you by your throat, and says, "Pay me all." And if you cannot pay even to the uttermost farthing, it shuts you up in the prison of condemnation, out of which you cannot escape! But, if it were possible for you to keep the law in its perfection outwardly, yet, remember, that you would be required to keep it in your *heart* as well as in your external life! One single motion of the heart from the right, one reception of even the shadow of a passing temptation, so as to become a partaker of sin, would ruin you! "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with your entire mind, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself." Fail here, and oh, who among us can be such a hypocrite as to think he has not failed 10,000 times? Fail here—and though your life were virtuous, though your exterior were such as even criticism itself must commend, yet you still perish because you have not kept the law, and yielded its full demands!

Remember, too, that it is clear you can never be saved by the law, because if up to this moment, your heart and life have been altogether without offense, yet it is required that it should be so even to your dying day! And, do you hope that as temptations come upon you thick as your moments, as your trials invade you numerous as the swarms which once thronged from the gates of Thebes, you will be able to stand against all these? Will there not be found some weak spot in your harness; will there not be some moment in which you may be tripped up—some instant when either the eyes may wander after lust, or the heart set on vanity? Can you say you would *never* stretch out your hand to touch that which is not good? Oh, man, remember, we are not sure that even this life would end that probation, for as long as you should live, and be God's creature, duty would still be due, and the law still your insatiable creditor! Forever would your happiness tremble in the scales! Even in heaven itself, the law would follow you;

even there, as your righteousness would be your *own*, it would never be finished! And even from yonder shining battlements you might fall, and amid those harps, wearing that white robe, *if you were to be saved by your own works*, there might be a possibility of perishing! The obedience of a creature can never be finished! The duty of a servant of the law is never over! As long as you were the creature of God, your Creator would have demands upon you! How much better to be accepted in the beloved, and to wear His finished righteousness as our glory and security! Now, in the face of all this, will any of you prefer to be saved by your works? Or, rather, will you prefer to be *damned* by your works? For that will certainly be the issue, let you hope what you may!

Now, I suppose, that in this congregation, we have but very few—there may be some—who would indulge a hope of being saved by the law in itself; but there is a delusion abroad that perhaps God will modify the law, or that at least, He will accept a sincere obedience, even if it is imperfect; that He will say, “Well, this man has done what he could, and, therefore, I will take what he has given as though it were perfect.” Now, remember, against this the Apostle Paul declares peremptorily, “By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified,” so that, that is answered at once! But, more than this, God’s law cannot change; it can never be content to take less from you than it demands. What said Christ? “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.” And again, He expressly said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill.” The law’s demands were met and fulfilled for believers by Christ; but, as far as those demands are concerned to those who are under it, they are as great, as heavy, and as rigorous, as ever they were! Unless His law could be changed, and that is impossible, God cannot accept anything but a *perfect obedience!* And, if you are hoping to be saved by your sincere endeavors to do your best, your hopes are rotten things, and delusions, falsehoods, and you will perish wrapped up in the shrouds of your pride! “Yes,” some say, “but could it not be partly by grace and partly by works?” No! The apostle says that boasting is excluded, and excluded by the law of faith; but if we let in the law of works in any degree, we cannot shut out boasting, for to that degree, you give man an opportunity to congratulate himself as having saved himself! Let me say broadly—to hope to be saved by works is a delusion! To hope to be saved by a method in which divine grace and works are co-acting, is not merely a delusion, but an *absurd* delusion! It is contrary to the very nature of things that divine grace and merit should ever mingle and co-work. Our apostle has declared times without number, that if it is of grace, it is not of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; and if it *is* of works, then it is *not* of grace, otherwise work is no more work. It must be either one or the other! These two cannot be married, for God forbids it! He will have it all grace or all works, all of Christ or all of man; but for Christ to be a make-weight, for Christ to supplement your narrow robes by patching on a piece of His own, for Christ to tread a part of the winepress, and for you to tread the rest; oh, this can never be! God will never be yoked with the creature! You might link an angel with a worm, and bid them fly together, but God with the creature—the precious blood of Jesus with the foul ditch-water of our human merits? Never! Never! Our paste gems, our varnished falsehoods, our righteousnesses which are but filthy rags, put with the real, true, precious, everlasting, divine things of Christ? Never! Unless heaven should blend in alliance with hell, and holiness hold dalliance with impurity, it must be one or the other, either man’s merit, absolutely and alone, or unmixed, unmerited favor from the Lord!

Now, I suppose, if I were to labor ever so arduously to hunt out this evil spirit from the sons of men, I should miss it still, for it hides in so many shapes, and therefore let me say, that in no shape, in no sense, in no single case, and in no degree whatever, are we saved by our works or by the law! I say in no sense, because men make such shifts to save alive their own righteousness. I will show you one man who says, “Well, I don’t expect to be saved by my honesty. I don’t expect to be saved by my generosity, nor by my morality. But then, I have been baptized; I receive the Lord’s Supper; I have been confirmed; I go to church, or I have a sitting in a meeting house; I am, as touching the ceremonies, blameless.” Well, friend, in that sense you cannot be saved by works, for all these things have no use whatever upon the matter of salvation, if you have not *faith!* If you are saved, God’s ordinances will be blessed things to you. But if you are not a believer, you have no right to them! And with regard to Baptism and the Supper, every time you touch them, you increase your guilt! Whether it is Baptism or the Lord’s Supper, you have no right to either, unless you are already saved! They are both ordinances for believers, and for believers, only. These ordinances are blessed means of divine grace to living, quickened, *saved souls*;

but to unsaved souls, to souls dead in trespasses and sins, these outward ordinances can have no use for good, but may increase their sin, because they touch unworthily the holy things of God! Oh, repose not in these! Oh, dream not that a priestly hand, and sacred drops, or a God-ordained baptism in the pool, can in any way redeem you from sin, or land you in heaven—for by this way salvation is impossible! But if I drive the lover of self-righteousness out of this haunt, he runs to another. You will find others who suppose that at least *their feelings*, which are only their works in another shape, may help to save them! There are thousands who think, “If I could weep so much, and groan so deeply, and experience so much humiliation, and a certain quantity of repentance, and so much of the terrors of the law, and of the thunders of conscience, *then I might come before God.*” souls, souls, this is work-mongering in its most damnable shape, for it has deluded far more than that bolder sort of work-trusting, which says, “I will rely upon what I do.” If you rely upon what you *feel*, you shall as certainly perish as if you trust to what you *do!* Repentance is a work of the Holy Spirit, and to be convicted of sin by God the Holy Spirit is a holy privilege, but, to think that these other things, in any way, win salvation, is to run clean counter to all the teachings of the Word, for salvation is of the free grace of God, alone! There are some, moreover, who believe that if their feelings cannot do it, still *their knowledge can!* They have a very sound creed; they have struck out this doctrine and that; they believe in justification by faith, and their sound creed is to them a confidence; they think that because they hold the theory of justification by faith, therefore they shall be saved. And oh, how they plume their feathers! How they set up their peacock tail because they happen to be orthodox! With what awful pride do they exult over their fellow professors, because they hold *the truth* and all the rest of the church, they think, is deluded with a lie!

Now this is nothing but salvation by works, only they are works performed by the *head* instead of by the hands. Oh, sirs, I will tell you—if you rest in creeds, if you hope to be saved because you can put your hand to the thirty-nine articles of an Episcopalian prayer book, or to the solemn league and covenant of the Presbyterian, or to the confession of faith of the Calvinist—if you fancy that because you happen to receive the truth of God in the head you shall be saved, you know not the truth of God but still cling to Satan’s lie—that salvation is of *man*, and not of God! I know that self-righteousness was born in our bones and that it will come out in our flesh, and even that man in whom its reigning power is kept down, will still feel it sometimes rising up. When he has preached a sermon and has got on pretty well, the devil will come up the pulpit stairs and say, “Well done!” When he has prayed in public, and has had unusual fluency, he will have to be careful lest there should be a whisper behind—“What a good and gifted man you are!” Yes, and even in his hallowed moments, when he is on the top of the mountain with his Lord, he will have to watch, even there, lest self-congratulation should suggest—“Oh, man, greatly-beloved, there must surely be something in you, or else God would not have done thus unto you!” brethren, when you are thinking of your sanctification, if you are tempted to look away from Christ—away with it! And, if when you are repenting of sin, you cannot still have one eye on Christ, remember it will be a repentance that will need to be repented of, for there is nothing in ourselves that can be offered to God! There is a stench and putridity in everything that is done of the creature, and we can never come before God except through Christ Jesus, who is made of God unto us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. I have thus tried to denounce the plan which God has rejected.

II. I shall now, in the second head, SHOW THAT BOASTING IS EXCLUDED, for in a blessed sense God has accepted the second plan, namely, the way of salvation by *faith* through divine grace.

The first man that entered heaven entered heaven by faith. “By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.” Over the tombs of all the goodly who were accepted of God, you may read the epitaph—“These all died in faith.” By faith they received the promise; and among all yonder bright and shining throng, there is not one who does not confess, “We have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The plan, then, which God has chosen, is one of divine grace, alone. I will try and picture that plan before our mind’s eye. We will imagine Boasting to be exceedingly desirous to enter into the kingdom of heaven. He marches to the door and knocks. The porter looks out and demands, “Who stands there?” “I am Boasting,” he says, “and I claim to have the highest seat! I claim that I should cry aloud and say, glory be unto man, for though he has fallen, he has lifted himself up, and worked out his own redemption.” And the angel says, “But have you not heard that the salvation of souls is not of man, nor by man, but that God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have

compassion on whom He will have compassion? Get out of here, Boasting, for the highest seat can never be yours, when God, in direct opposition to human merit, has rejected the Pharisee, and chosen the publican and the harlot, that they may enter into the kingdom of heaven." So Boasting says, "Let me take my place, then, if not in the highest seat, yet somewhere amid the glittering throng; for instance, let me take my place in the seat of *election*. Let it be said and taught, that albeit God did choose His people, yet it was because of their works which He foresaw, and their faith which He foreknew, and that, therefore, foreseeing and foreknowing, He did choose them because of an excellence which His prescient eyes discovered in them. Let me take my seat here." But the porter says, "No, you cannot take your place there, for election is according to the eternal purpose of God, which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world was. This election is not of works, but of grace, and the reason for God's choice of man is in Himself, and not in man. And as for those virtues which you say God did foreknow, God is the Author of all of them if they exist, and that which is an effect cannot be a first cause! God foreordained these men to faith and to good works, and their faith and good works could not have been the cause of their foreordination!" Then straight from heaven's gate the trumpet sounded—"For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him who calls—it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.")

Then Boasting found that as works had no place in election, so there was no room for him to take his seat there, and he thought about where next he could be. So after a while, Boasting says to the porter, "If I cannot mount the chair of election, I will be content to sit in the place of conversion, for surely, it is man who repents and believes." The porter did not deny the truth of that, and then this evil Boasting said, "If one man believes and not another, surely, that must be the act of the man's will, and his will being free and unbiased, it must be very much to that man's credit that he believes and repents, and is therefore saved, for others, having like opportunities with himself, and no doubt having the same grace, reject the preferred mercy and perish, while this man accepts it, and therefore let me at least take my seat there." But the angel said in anger, "Take your seat there? Why, that would be to take the highest place of all, for this is the hinge and turning-point, and if you leave that with man, then you give him the brightest jewel in the crown! Does the Ethiopian change his skin and the leopard his spots? Is it not God who works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure? Of His own will He begat us with the Word of truth, and it is not of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of birth. Oh, Boasting, your free will is a lie! It is not man that chooses God, but God that chooses man. What did Christ say—"You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." And what did He say to the ungodly multitude, "You will not come unto Me that you might have life." In which He gave the death-blow to all ideas of free will, when He declared that man *will not* come to Him that he might have life! And then, He said again, in another place, as if that were not enough, "No man can come unto Me except the Father which has sent Me draw him." So Boasting, though he was glad not to admit it, was shut out, and could not take his place in heaven upon the stool of conversion! And while he stood there but little abashed, for bashfulness he knows not, he heard a song floating over the battlements of heaven from all the multitude who were there, in accents like these, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name, O Lord, be the praise"—

*"It was the same love that spread the feast
That gently forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin!"*

"But then," said Boasting, "if I may not have so high a place, let me at least sit on the lowly stool of perseverance, and let it at least be said that while God saved the man, and is therefore to have the glory, still the man was faithful to grace received; he did not turn back unto perdition, but watched and was very careful, and kept himself in the love of God, and therefore there is considerable credit due to him; for while many drew back and perished, and he might have done the same, he struggled against sin, and thus, by his using his grace, he safely kept himself. Let me sit, then, on the chair of perseverance." But the angel replied, "No, no, what have you to do with it? I know it is written, 'keep yourselves in the love of God,' but the same apostle forbids all fleshly trust in human effort by that blessed doxology—'Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.' That which is a command in one Scripture is a covenant promise in an-

other, where it is written, ‘I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me.’” Oh, brothers and sisters, well do you and I know, that our standing does not depend upon ourselves! If that Arminian doctrine, that our perseverance rests somewhere in our own hands, were true, then damnation must be the lot of us all! I cannot keep myself a minute, much less year after year—

*‘If ever it should come to pass,
That sheep of Christ should fall away;
My fickle, feeble soul, alas!
Would fall a thousand times a day.’*

But what says the Scripture?—“I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand; My Father who gave them Me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand.” And what says the apostle—“I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” I have not time to quote all the innumerable passages, but it is absolutely certain that if there is one doctrine in Scripture more clearly revealed than another, it is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints by the power of the Holy Spirit! The man who doubts that precious truth of God, has quite as much reason to doubt the Trinity, to doubt the divinity of Christ, or the fact of the atonement, for nothing can be more clear in the plain, common sense meaning of the words than this, that they who are in Christ have, even today, eternal life and shall never perish! Now, since this perseverance is not dependent upon our works, but like all the rest of salvation, is a flowing outward from the bottomless love of God, boasting is manifestly excluded! But once again, and lastly, Boasting sometimes asks to be admitted a little into glorification. I fear sometimes that a doctrine which is popular in the church, about degrees of glory, is not altogether unassociated with that old self-righteousness of ours which is very loath to die. “One star differs from another star in glory” is a great truth—but this the stars may do without differing in degrees. One star may shine with one radiance, and another with another; indeed, astronomers tell us that there are many varieties of color among stars of the same magnitude! One man may differ from another, without supposing a difference in rank, honor, or degree. For my part, I do not see anything about *degrees* in glory in Scripture, and I do not believe in the doctrine; at least if there are degrees; mark this, they cannot be according to *works*, but must be of divine grace alone! I cannot consider that because one Christian has been more devoted to Christ than another, therefore, there will be an eternal difference, for this is to introduce works. This is to bring in again the old Hagar marriage, and to bring back the child of the bondwoman, whereof God has said, “The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with My son, even with Isaac.” Oh, brothers and sisters, I think we can serve God from some other motive than that base one of trying to be greater than our brethren in heaven! If I should get to heaven at all, I do not care who is greater than I am, for if anyone shall have more happiness in heaven than I shall, then I shall have more happiness, too; for the sympathy between one soul and another will there be so intense and so great, that all the heavens of the righteous will be my heaven, and therefore, what you have, I shall have, because we shall all be one in fellowship far more perfectly than on earth. The private member will there be swallowed up in the common body.

Surely, brothers and sisters, if any of you can have brighter places in heaven, and more happiness and more joy than I, I will be glad to know it. The prospect does not excite any envy in my soul now, or if it did *now*, it certainly would not *then*, for I should feel, that the more *you* had, the more *I* should have! Perfect communion in all good things is not compatible with the private enrichment of one above another. Even on earth, the saints had all things common when they were in a heavenly state, and I am persuaded they will have all things common in glory. I do not believe in gentlemen in heaven, and the poor Christians behind the door; I believe that our union with each other will be so great, that distinctions will be utterly lost, and that we shall all have such a joint communion, and interest, and fellowship, that there will be no such thing as private possessions, private ranks, and private honors—for we shall there, to the fullest extent, be one in Christ! I do believe that Boasting is shut out there, but I think that if there were these degrees in glory, I mean if they are dependent on works done on earth, Boasting would at least get his tail in; if it did not insinuate its whole body, it would at least get some of its unhallowed members over the wall, whereas, the text says it is excluded. Let me enlarge this one word, and then proceed. It does not say, “Boasting, you are to be allowed to come in and sit down on the floor.” No, shut the door

and do not let him in at all. "But let me in," he says, "and I will be quiet." No, shut him out altogether! "But at least let me put my foot in." No, exclude him; shut him out altogether. "But at least let me sometimes go in and out." No, shut him out altogether. Exclude him; bolt the door; put double padlocks on it. Say once and for all, "Boasting, get you gone; you are hurled down and broken in pieces, and if you can refit yourself, and come once more to the gate to ask admittance, you shall be driven away with shame." It is *excluded*; it cannot be let in, in any sense, in any term, nor in any degree! As Calvin says, "Not a particle of boasting can be admitted, because not a particle of work is admitted into the covenant of grace." It is of divine grace from top to bottom, from Alpha to Omega; it is not of man, nor by man, not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy, and therefore, boasting is excluded by the law of faith.

III. And now, thirdly and very briefly. Beloved in Christ Jesus, what a precious truth of God I have now to hold up to the eyes of poor lost sinners, who today are aware that they have no merits of their own! Soul, THE VERY GATE WHICH SHUTS OUT BOASTING, SHUTS IN HOPE AND JOY FOR YOU!

Let me state this truth of God broadly, that the ignorant may catch it. You say today, "Sir, I never attend the house of God, and up to this time I have been a thief and a drunkard." Well, you stand today on the same level as the most moral sinner, and the most honest unbeliever, in the matter of salvation! They are lost, since they believe not, and so are you. If the most honest is saved, it will not be by their *honesty*, but by the free grace of God! And if the most evil would be saved, it must be by the same plan. There is one gate to heaven for the most chaste, and the most debauched. When we come to God, the best of us can bring nothing, and the worst of us can bring no less. I know when I state it thus, some will say, "Then what is the good of morality?" I will tell you. Two men have fallen overboard. One man has a dirty face, and the other a clean one. There is a rope thrown over from the stern of the vessel, and only that rope will save the sinking men—whether their faces are fair or foul! Is not this the truth? Do I therefore underrate cleanliness? Certainly not; but it will not save a drowning man; nor will morality save a dying man. The clean man may sink with all his cleanliness and the dirty man may be drawn up with all his filth, if the rope does but get its hold of him! Or take this case. Here we have two persons, each with a deadly cancer. One of them is rich and clothed in purple, the other is poor and wrapped about with a few rags. And I say to them—"You are both on a par now, here comes the Physician Himself—Jesus, the King of disease; His touch can heal you both; there is no difference between you whatever!" Do I therefore say that the one man's robes are not better than the other's rags? Of course they are better in some respects, but they have nothing to do with the matter of curing disease! So morality is a neat cover for foul venom, but it does not alter the fact that the heart is vile and the man, himself, under condemnation. Suppose I were an army surgeon, and there had been a battle. There is one man there—he is a captain and a brave man; he led his rank into the thick of the battle, and he is bleeding out his life from a terrible gash. By his side there lies a man of the rank and file, and a great coward too, wounded in the same way. I come up to both of them, and I say, "You are both in the same condition; you have both the same sort of wound, and I can heal you both." But if either of you should say, "Get away from me; I'll have nothing to do with you," your wound will be your death! If the captain should say, "I do not need you; I am a captain, go and see to that poor dog yonder," would his courage and rank save his life? No, they are good things, but not saving things! So is it with good works, men can be damned with them as well as without them if they make them their trust! Oh, what a gospel is this to preach in our theatres; to tell those hedge-birds, those who are full of all manner of loathsomeness, that there is the same way of salvation open to them as to a peer of the realm, or a bishop on the bench! That there is no difference between us in the way of mercy, that we are all condemned! That there may be degrees as to our guilt, but that the fact of our condemnation is quite as certain to the best as to the worst! "Oh" you say, "this is a leveling doctrine!" Ah, bless God if you are leveled! "Oh," you say, "but this cuts at everything that is good in man!" Ah, thank God if it kills everything in which man glories, for that which man thinks to be good is often an abomination in the sight of God! And oh, if all of us together, moral or immoral, chaste or debauched, honest or unholy, can come with the rope about our neck and with the weeds of penitence upon our loins, and say, "Great God, forgive us; we are all guilty, give us grace; we do not deserve it; bestow upon us Your favor; we have no right to it, but give it to us because Jesus died." Oh, He will never cast out one that way, for that is the way of salvation!

And if we can put our hand this morning—no matter though it were black last night with lust, or red up to the elbow with murder—yet, if we can put our hand on Jesus' head, and believe on Him—the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanses us from all sin! Where is boasting now? You who have done so much for humanity—you cannot boast, for you have nothing to boast of! You fine gentlemen and noble ladies, what do you say of this? O be wise, and join in the prayer, “But You, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!” And may the Lord then pronounce over us His sentence, “You are clean; go and sin no more. Your iniquities are all forgiven you.”

IV. I close by just observing, that THE SAME PLAN WHICH SHUTS OUT BOASTING LEADS US TO A GRACIOUS GRATITUDE TO CHRIST.

We are sometimes asked by people, “Do you think that such a thing is necessary to salvation?” Or, perhaps the question is put in another way, “How long do you think a man must be godly in order to be saved?” I reply, dear friend, you do not understand us, for we hold that these things do not save in any sense. “Why, then,” they say, “are you baptized?” Or, “Why do you walk in holiness?” Well, not *to save* myself but *because I am saved!* When I know that every sin of mine is forgiven, that I cannot be lost, that Christ has sworn to bring me to the place where He is; then I say, Lord what is there that I can do for You? Tell me. Can I burn for You? Blessed would be the stake if I might kiss it! If You have done so much for me, what can I do for You? Is there an ordinance that involves self-denial? Is there a duty which will compel me to self-sacrifice? So much the better—

*‘Now for the love I bear His name,
What was my gain I count my lost!
By former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to His cross!’*

This is the way to do good works; and good works are impossible until we come here. Anything that you do by which *to save yourself* is a selfish act, and therefore cannot be good. Only that which is done for God's glory is good in a Scriptural sense. *A man must be saved before he can do a good work.* But when saved, having nothing to get and nothing to lose; standing now in Christ, blessed and accepted—he begins to serve God out of pure gratitude and love! Then virtue is possible, and he may climb to its highest steeps, and stand safely there without fear of the boasting which would cast him down! He will feel, even then, that his standing is not in what *he has done*, nor in what *he is*, nor in what *he hopes to be*, but in what *Christ did*, and in the, “It is finished,” which made his eternal salvation secure!

O for divine grace that we may live to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the beloved, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God! Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to Him be glory forever! Amen.

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